

HURRICANE MITCH RECONSTRUCTION UPDATE



USAID/Nicaragua Hurricane Mitch Reconstruction Program

(U.S. Millions of Dollars) \$103.6

Public Health 30.6

Economic Reactivation 53.5

Disaster Mitigation 6.6

Education 4.5

Municipal Infrastructure 2.9

Transparency and Accountability 1.0

Food Aid 4.5



Departments of Nicaragua
Affected by Hurricane Mitch

ESTELI COMMUNITIES PARTICIPATE IN WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PROJECT

Estelí, Nicaragua—Pockets of shallow water fill sections of the tributaries that run through the Estelí River basin, while the surrounding land is dry and crops are parched as the area experiences a drought. But residents can testify to the torrential flow of the rivers during a normal rainy season—torrents that became a devastating fury during Hurricane Mitch.

In the community of Santa Teresa alone, 40 families lost their homes when the Pire River overflowed its banks during Hurricane Mitch. Nearly all farmers in the area lost their crops that year and thousands of hectares of farmland were destroyed by flooding and landslides.

Beatriz Hernandez recalls how the Pire River carried away her home and everything in it.

“Thank God, my family all



Residents of the Santa Teresa community, including many women, are participating in a USAID-funded watershed program through CARE.

got out safely,” said Hernandez who spent three months living with relatives before moving into new housing provided by an international donor.

Hernandez is now an active participant in a USAID-funded project, implemented by CARE, to protect the Estelí River watershed basin from future disasters.

The \$900,000 project identified 22 sites within the 1,323-square kilometer Estelí River basin where people, farmland and natural resources are particularly vulnerable. More than 2,000 families in the area participate in the project constructing gabions and retaining walls against flooding, planting trees to reforest the area and building barriers to prevent soil erosion.



Community members build gabions, like these, and plant trees to stabilize embankments and prevent flooding.

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WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PROJECT...

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Community members, including many women, built and positioned more than 1,500 gabions, (chain-link cages filled with rocks), to support embankments and protect against flooding. The USAID/CARE watershed project has already distributed half a million fruit and shade trees to families and schools to reforest the area.



Mercedes Cruz is a member of the forest fire brigade, organized by the USAID/CARE watershed project in the community of La Montañita.

Teófila Tercero helped dredge a causeway and build gabions to flank the sides in the same place where rushing water swept away her brother's dwelling in the community of Santa Teresa during Hurricane Mitch.

"I worked my fingers to the bone hauling rocks," said Tercero. "It took us 21 days to build this but it will give us protection for a long time to come."

Residents planted trees to stabilize embankments along the sides of the causeway and each family received fruit and shade trees to plant on their own property. Tercero received seeds to set up a family vegetable garden, eight fruit trees and 20 shade trees through the program.

The project also organized 127 forest fire brigades in 50 communities of the Esteli River basin. The volunteer firefighters received training and equipment, including helmets, gloves, axes and shovels. The fire brigades in the community of La Montañita have already been

called into action on four occasions. Firefighter Mercedes Cruz recalls how he was roused from bed at 4 a.m. when someone spotted flames on a distant hillside. "It took us half an hour to get there, carrying our equipment and buckets of water, and about two hours to put out the fire," said Cruz.

The USAID/CARE watershed project emphasizes the human impact on the environment. Project participants attend workshops on sustainable use of natural resources and farming methods that increase productivity and reduce hazards. Colorful, easy-to-read brochures are distributed to farmers giving instructions on horizontal planting on slopes and building barriers against soil erosion. The workshops also promote better health and nutrition as part of the overall goal of improving living conditions for the population of the area.

"This project helped us when we needed it most," said Beatriz Hernandez., "and continues to help us build a better community."



Students at the Itsmania School in Esteli learn about protecting the environment by planting trees and making organic fertilizer.

"I worked my fingers to the bone hauling rocks. It took us 21 days to build this but it will give us protection for a long time to come."

Teófila Tercero, resident of Santa Teresa, Estelí on building gabions to protect against flooding.



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